

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY PRAGUE

AMEMBASSY SOFIA

USDEL MBFR VIENNA

AMEMBASSY WARSAW

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 3562

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, UR, XG

SUBJ: THE SMALL SOVIET DILEMMA IN THE BALKANS

REF: STATE 46523

1. SUMMARY. EXTRAPOLATING A LITTLE FROM THE EXCELLENT
INR REPORT ON THE BALKAN CONFERENCE TRANSMITTED REFTEL,
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IT SEEMS TO US THAT THE SOVIETS FACE A SMALL BUT REAL

DILEMMA IN THE TREND TOWARD GREATER DOMESTICITY AMONG BALKAN COUNTRIES. EITHER SEE BULGARIA ISOLATED IN THE AREA, OR SEE THEIR LAST AREA SATELLITE DRIFT TOWARD A MORE COMPLEX INTERNATIONAL SITUATION WITH SUPPLEMENTARY OPTIONS. THE QUANDARY IS ONLY LESS SEVERE FOR THE BULGARIANS, WHO PRESENTLY HAVE NEITHER THE DESIRE NOR THE INCENTIVE TO SEPARATE THEMSELVES FROM THEIR SOVIET SPONSORS, BUT THAT SMALL DIFFERENCE COULD BE POLITICALLY SIGNIFICANT OVER TIME, SINCE THEY HAVE MORE TO LOSE THAN THE SOVIETS FROM BEING ISOLATED AS THEIR BALKAN NEIGHBORS MULTIPLY INTRA-AREA TIES. WHILE IT MAY NOT BE WORTHWHILE TO PROJECT DETAILED SCENARIOS FOR THE BALKANS, GIVEN THE MURKY INTRICACY OF POLITICS THERE, IT IS PROBABLY WORTHWHILE TO ASSUME THE SOVIETS ARE AWARE OF THE DILEMMA THEY FACE IN AN AREA AS VITAL TO THEM AS WESTERN EUROPE. END SUMMARY.

2. THE INR STUDY OF THE BALKAN CONFERENCE TRANSMITTED REFTEL IS THE LATEST IN A SERIES OF WELL BALANCED, WELL WRITTEN, INFORMATIVE REPORTS ON TOPICS RELEVANT TO OUR WORK HERE WHICH WE FIND EXTREMELY USEFUL, ESPECIALLY WHEN THEY ARRIVE BY CABLE, AND FOR WHICH WE ARE GRATEFUL. THE ONLY COMMENT WHICH OCCURS IS NEITHER A RESERVATION NOR A QUALIFICATION, BUT RATHER AN EXTENSION OF POINTS MADE IN THE STUDY ITSELF.

3. FROM THE "GREAT POWER" PERSPECTIVE OF MOSCOW, IT LOOKS AS IF THE SOVIETS FACE A REAL DILEMMA IN DEALING WITH THE TREND OF RECENT YEARS TOWARD GREATER DOMESTICITY AMONG BALKAN COUNTRIES, OF WHICH THE BALKAN CONFERENCE IS THE LATEST AND MOST VISIBLE INDICATOR.

4. IT IS A SMALL DILEMMA--THE PACE IS GLACIAL, EACH STEP TAKES PLACE AT THE MARGIN OF THE STATUS QUO, AND THE TIME FRAME FOR IMPORTANT CHANGE IS QUITE LONG--BUT IT IS NEVERTHELESS GENUINE. AS INR DESCRIBES IT, THE HOBSON'S CHOICE FOR THE SOVIETS IS BETWEEN SEEING BULGARIA ISLOATED IN THE BALKANS OR SEEING THE USSR'S LAST AREA SATELLITE DRIFT AWAY FROM PURE SATELLITE STATUS TOWARD A MORE COMPLEX INTERNATIONAL SITUATION WHICH INCLUDES SUPPLEMENTARY OPTIONS AND CHOICES.

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5. IN THIS LIGHT, THE SOVIET HAND ON THE BULGARIAN FOOT DESCRIBED BY THE STUDY ON THE BALKAN CONFERENCE IS A NATURAL PHENOMENON, EVEN IF UNEXPECTED. IN OUR DAILY READING OF THE SOVIET PRESS WE DID NOT FIND A SINGLE REFERENCE TO THE CONFERENCE, AND FOR THE SOVIETS MEDIA SILENCE IS VERY OFTEN A SIGN OF QUANDARY.

6. PRESUMABLY, THE QUANDARY IS ONLY A LITTLE LESS SEVERE FOR THE BULGARIANS THEMSELVES. WHILE THE BALKANS ARE IMPORTANT TO THEM, THEY APPEAR TO HAVE NEITHER THE DESIRE NOR THE INCENTIVE TO SEPARATE THEMSELVES IN ANY WAY FROM THEIR SOVIET SPONSORS; INDEED, THE BALKANS ARE THE ARENA WHERE THEY ARE MOST ISOLATED, AND MOST IN NEED OF SUPPORT. AT THE VERY LEAST, WE CAN EXPECT TO SEE EVERYTHING THEY DO, ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, ORNAMENTED BY DISPLAYS OF THE KIND OF FIDELITY WHICH TUGS AT SOVIET HEART-AND PURSE-STRINGS.

7. NEVERTHELESS, OVER THE LONGER TERM IT MAY BE THAT THE TINY GAP IN SEVERITY BETWEEN THE BULGARIAN QUANDARY AND THE SOVIET QUANDARY CAN BECOME POLITICALLY SIGNIFICANT, IN THE SENSE THAT THE BULGARIANS HAVE MORE TO LOSE THAN THE SOVIETS IF THEY ARE ISOLATED WHILE THEIR NEIGHBORS MULTIPLY INTRA-AREA TIES. IN THAT SENSE, ALL THEIR NEIGHBORS HAVE TO DO TO KEEP THE BULGARIANS' FEET TO THE FIRE IS TO KEEP IT GOING, AND THROW ON AN OCCASIONAL SMALL LOG.

8. AT THIS POINT IT MAKES NO SENSE TO DEVELOP ELABORATE SCENARIOS FACTORING IN GREEK DISSAPPOINTMENT AT QUALIFIED EC ACCEPTANCE, THE ROMANIAN PUSH FOR BALKAN ARMS CONTROL AFTER MBFR, THE LOOMING YUGOSLAV SUCCESSION CRISIS, OR THE COST/BENEFIT CALCULUS IN BULGARIAN FOREIGN ECONOMIC RELATIONS: THEY WILL ALWAYS BE OVERTAKEN BY EVENTS IN A REALM OF POLITICS WHICH IS NOT ONLY MURKY TO OUTSIDERS BUT GENUINELY INTRICATE. ALL THE DIRECT PARTICIPANTS, INCLUDING THE SOVIETS, ARE OLD HANDS AT FINE SHADINGS. BUT IT DOES MAKE SENSE, IN OUR VIEW, TO ASSUME THAT THE SOVIETS ARE CONSCIOUS OF THE DILEMMA THEY FACE IN AN AREA EVERY BIT AS VITAL TO THEM (IF NOT TO US) AS WESTERN EUROPE. CONFIDENTIAL

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